



Coastside Fishing Club
666 Brighton Road, Pacifica, CA 94044

To: California Fish and Game Commission
Date: July 19, 2005
Re: MLPA Public Comment Opportunity

Dear Commissioners,

My name is Ben Sleeter and I am the MLPA Coordinator and member of the Board of Directors of the Coastside Fishing Club – a recreational fishing club based in the San Francisco Bay Area. I serve as Coastside's representative on the MLPA's Statewide Interest Group and the Central Coast Regional Stakeholder Group and have been involved in this process for the past year. Coastside is a group of approximately 10,000 salt water anglers in California. As an organization we are active in many fisheries related issues including the PFMC's Essential Fish Habitat, recreational groundfish catch estimation, and the MLPA to name just a few.

I am here today to discuss a few details of the ongoing MLPA process.

The MLPA provides the legal authority to the State of California to significantly enhance recreational fishing in state waters. If carried out according to the objectives of the Legislature, California recreational anglers will greatly benefit from the conservation and enhancement of many groundfish species that are the foundation of a healthy recreational fishery. However, if the MLPA is implemented NOT in a way the Legislature intended the potential exists for significant and permanent damage to an economically valuable recreational activity.

I appreciate this opportunity to address a few concerns Coastside has with the current climate of the MLPA.

A network of MPAs vs. a network of reserves

The MLPA Act requires, among many other things, "an improved marine reserve component." It DOES NOT require blanket permanent closures of 25% or more of California's state waters as seen in the Channel Islands MLPA implementation. Even though the language of the Act is very clear about the role of marine reserves there are many within the scientific and environmental communities that see the MLPA as a "road to reserves." This attitude towards reserves has been made very clear as members of the science advisory team have made open statements about the "creation of a network of reserves." We maintain – and ask the Commission to insist – that the other two types of MPAs defined by the state, parks and conservation areas, be the primary tools used to create a functioning network of MPAs while being enhanced in site-specific areas with no-take marine reserves. This approach will fully meet the requirements of the MLPA,



enhance recreational activities, and make a significant conservation effort in California's state waters.

De-facto MPA's

When the MLPA was enacted in 1999 the Legislature made it clear that more needed to be done to protect California's nearshore species. Since 1999, and separate from the MLPA, several programs have been enacted to do exactly this. The Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) and the Cowcod Conservation Area (CCA) are **just two** specific examples of the state and federal government taking measures to protect species of concern. While these two programs do not have "MPA" attached to their name they function in the **precisely the** same way. Both are area-based closures with the RCA covering much of state waters along the central coast. In most years **and regions along the coast** all waters deeper than 20 fathoms are off limits to all recreational take of rockfish while permitting the recreational and commercial take of salmon and pelagic species such as albacore tuna. In this regard **these existing closure areas** function the same as State Marine Conservation Areas – a primary type of MPA. The RCA alone would more than satisfy the requirements for a network of MPAs due to its geographic configuration. **In addition the PFMCI took action this June to close specific areas with sensitive bottom habitat, including corals, to commercial bottom trawl operations under its Essential Fish Habitat authority. By this action, many more specific areas equivalent to Marine Conservation Areas are being added to the network of real, but untitled MPAs.**

A Plausible Scenario

Much talk within the scientific community revolves around closing roughly 25% of state waters to fishing in the form of marine reserves. This number is substantiated in the results of the Channel Islands implementation and can be looked at as a plausible outcome for the current process. However, the central coast of California is significantly different geographically than the Channel Islands. Hard-bottom rocky areas are not uniformly dispersed along the central coast. Rather, they are located in site-specific areas such as Duxbury Reef, the Farallon Islands, Colorado Reef, and Ano Nuevo separated by tens of miles. Because the MLPA focuses on the improvement of specific species through area-based closures – predominately groundfish – it is reasonable to expect these areas as targets for MPAs. These types of areas constitute a small percentage of the central coast and given this 25% number it is possible that we see the majority of all productive groundfish areas placed off-limits to recreational angling. Combining the existing RCA with future closures of this magnitude would essentially eliminate all recreational take of rockfish from coastal waters or intensifying the effort of such a small area that a fishery could not be sustained.

Another item of concern is the impact no-take marine reserves would have on keystone fisheries such as king salmon – species identified as NOT likely to benefit from MPAs.



Historically productive and important areas such as Soquel Hole and Duxbury Reef are examples. Should an area need protections in the form of MPAs it should be incumbent upon the state to use methods that do not interfere with vital economic industries such as salmon fishing, whenever possible. The MLPA provides this opportunity. Simply designating an area a conservation area or park could accomplish this socioeconomic goal while still satisfying the requirements of the MLPA. Another approach should be to design a network that includes ocean bottom and several feet above as a marine reserve while the remaining water column would be designated a marine conservation area or marine park. For example, recent efforts by the Monterey Bay Sanctuary at the Federal level have resulted in the creation of a similar such conservation zone at Davidson Sea Mount.

Funding considerations

Funding is an ever contentious issue in the MLPA. My remarks today are not meant to reiterate points made in the “Coastside White Paper” submitted to the Commission, rather to shed light on other significant challenges in the funding arena.

Currently the CCRSG is working on developing MPA network alternatives for the central coast study region – Pigeon Point to Point Conception. What this group is being asked to do is prepare goals, objectives, review proposals, and generally formulate a plan to implement a network of MPAs, all without having any idea as to what is economically feasible. At the very least this group needs to have a ball park figure as to what should be reasonably expected from the state in regards to monitoring and evaluation of newly created MPAs. While the BRTF is charged with developing a long term funding strategy it is being done separate and behind the CCRSG’s work on the central coast. From a practical viewpoint this does not make sense. When combining the lack of funding for monitoring and evaluation of MPAs with the unprecedented funding arrangement with the Resource Legacy Fund Foundation it is understandable people see the current MLPA implementation as a rush to permanent no-take reserves that will not have any productive monitoring and evaluation program.

Timeline

One topic that is constantly harped upon by volunteer organizations is the very short timeline in which this process is working. To give you an example of how time intensive this one particular issue is I will read you the last two weeks of meetings:

July 6: SAT meeting in San Luis Obispo
July 7-8: CCRSG meetings in Morro Bay
July 11 – 12: BRTF meeting in Santa Barbara
July 19: CFG MLPA meeting



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It is unreasonable for the state of California to expect adequate stakeholder participation from volunteer organizations given these types of time-frames. A schedule like this works for paid employees dedicated to covering specific state processes but for volunteer organizations – like many of the recreational organizations that come to speak before you – this is next to impossible.

Fortunately, none of these concerns is without a solution. We hope the Commission takes time to thoroughly review work done in these preliminary stages and insist that every opportunity exists in order to produce a network of MPAs that not only improves the health of California's marine resources but also but its recreational fishery as well.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the MLPA.

Signed,

Ben Sleeter
Coastside Fishing Club